

# *The Political Economy of the Southern Agrarian Tradition*

A N D R E W   W.   F O S H E E

IN 1930 a group of Southern intellectuals published a volume of essays which attacked what they viewed as the rampant "industrial commercialism" which had overtaken the North and which was invading the South in full force. It was a book of principles rather than of policies, though policy suggestions would follow in later publications. Uppermost in the minds of these men, however, was their "feeling of intense disgust with the spiritual disorder of modern life—its destruction of human integrity and its lack of purpose. . . ." They sought "a life which through its own conditions and purposefulness would engender naturally (rather than by artificial stimulation), order, leisure, character, stability, and that would also, in the larger sense, be aesthetically enjoyable."<sup>1</sup>

The Twelve Southerners who contributed to *I'll Take My Stand* realized that their model for the good life was grounded in the agrarian tradition of the Old South. And as Donald Davidson said in his recollection of the making of this book, "By this route we came at last to economics and so found ourselves at odds with the prevailing schools of economic thought." The Twelve Southerners rejected the economic determinism of those who argued that industrialization was "meant to be." Life ought to determine economics rather than the reverse.<sup>2</sup> Industrialism, however, did not include every use of machinery but rather that giant industrialism which dominates every aspect of human life.<sup>3</sup> For these writers "the evil of industrial economics was that it squeezed all human motives into one narrow channel and then looked for humanitarian means to repair the injury. The virtue of the Southern agrarian tradition was that it mixed up a great many motives with the economic motive, thus

enriching it and reducing it to a proper subordination."<sup>4</sup> This is the normative political economy which Allen Tate, another of the Twelve Southerners, explicitly called for in the article he contributed to the Agrarian-Distributist symposium *Who Owns America?* In that symposium Tate says, "We have been mere economists, and now we have got to be political economists as well. Economics is the study of wealth. But political economy is the study of human welfare."<sup>5</sup> It is the normative political economy that Donald Davidson discusses in his critique of New Deal political-economic thought and agrarian statecraft.<sup>6</sup>

No effort was made in the essays making up *I'll Take My Stand* to construct a working scheme for the operation of industry in an agrarian economy. Neither was there an effort to particularize a program for the farm in that book.<sup>7</sup> *I'll Take My Stand* was instead a "commentary on the nature of man—man as Southerner, as American, as human being."<sup>8</sup> It was a study which the authors hoped would serve as a "preliminary to a specific application" which could be worked out "slowly and critically." But such a deliberate approach to the problem of application did not come about. Some general policy prescriptions were later presented by a few of the Twelve Southerners—most prominently by Donald Davidson, Frank Owsley, and John Crowe Ransom—but these policies were neither comprehensive nor universally agreed upon by the original group.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the political-economic thought of the Twelve Southerners was never developed sufficiently to justify treating it as a system of political economy—i.e., as "an exposition of a comprehensive set of economic policies that the author advocates on the strength of certain unifying normative principles."<sup>10</sup> The

Twelve Southerners did, however, make an important contribution to political economy in this century with the writing of *I'll Take My Stand*. They did so not in the realm of policy making but in the formulation of first principles, an aspect of political economy that existed before the logical positivists stripped away its normative branch.<sup>11</sup> Through their consideration of questions of both "is" and "ought" the Twelve Southerners adhered to and preserved a Southern and ancient tradition in the study of political economy inherited from men such as Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Dew, both of them agrarians.<sup>12</sup> It was a tradition which had been disavowed by twentieth-century political economists who had accepted logical positivist methodology.

The Twelve Southerners' book exemplifies political economy in the Socratic tradition—the science of choosing ends conducive to the good life with an art of acquisition playing the subordinate role.<sup>13</sup> Its methodological influence is manifested in the works of an intellectual heir of the Southern Agrarians at Vanderbilt—Richard M. Weaver—who vigorously argued for abandoning logical positivism and for returning to the Socratic tradition in studying human society. Richard Weaver's call to replace "value-free" social science with normative social philosophy epitomizes the Twelve Southerners' contribution to the study of political economy. Indeed, it is a distillation of the methodological practice inherent in their work. Weaver found in the agrarianism of the Twelve Southerners a framework for a system of normative political economy which allows the practitioner to avoid the nihilism of twentieth-century forms of political economy—welfare economics and the "New Political Economy" of James M. Buchanan are good examples and are briefly discussed at the end of this paper—and to associate himself instead with "the love of wisdom."<sup>14</sup> This, then, is the contribution to modern political economy located in the Twelve Southerners' book: it has helped to preserve ancient methodological wisdom in the study of human society acting as an example of how the problems of choosing ends and formulating first principles are approached by

men who seek to construct a system of political economy in the Socratic tradition.

Because the contribution that the authors of *I'll Take My Stand* made to political economy involved the selection of ends—things conducive to the good or happy life—a brief review of portions of that text with regard to the ends of agrarianism and the relationship of agriculture to those ends is in order. The introductory essay and those of some of the more avowedly agrarian members of this group—John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Andrew Lytle—provide examples of the Twelve Southerners' discussion of first principles for Southern agrarian political economy in the twentieth century.

In the introductory "Statement of Principles" of *I'll Take My Stand*, one finds a definition of an agrarian society and the prerequisite conditions of human happiness which were the ends of such a society:

An agrarian society is hardly one that has no use at all for industries, for professional vocations, for scholars and artists, and for the life of cities. Technically, perhaps, an agrarian society is one in which agriculture is the leading vocation, whether for wealth, for pleasure, or for prestige—a form of labor that is pursued with intelligence and leisure, and that becomes the model to which the other forms approach as well as they may. But an agrarian regime will be secured readily enough where the superfluous industries are not allowed to rise against it. The theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, industrialism is "the economic organization of the collective American society. It means the decision of society to invest its economic resources in the applied sciences."<sup>16</sup> The use of science in industry could have contributed to the good life by making industrial labor easier, more secure, and to some extent more leisurely and enjoyable. It had, indeed, done just the opposite. The philosophy of applied science assumes

that labor itself is an evil and that only the end product is good. Hence one of "the happy functions of human life" is abandoned in the name of consumption, "the grand end which justifies the evil of modern labor. . . ."<sup>17</sup> Such actions do, however, have a price. Modern man loses his sense of vocation and becomes a slave to a servile and mercenary labor. Industrial progress has generated an output that exceeds man's "rate of natural consumption," so advertising and personal salesmanship are called upon to bring consumer wants into line with man's increased ability to produce. This is "the great effort of a false economy of life to approve itself" by enticing people to labor and to consume without regard to their own happiness.<sup>18</sup>

To make matters worse, the evils of industrialism have brought forth suggested remedies the most extreme of which is that men should simply give up their freedom and allow matters to be made right by a group of super-engineers "who will adapt production to consumption and regulate prices and guarantee business against fluctuations. . . ." Indeed, the blind drift of American industrial development is leading to that very end.<sup>19</sup> Religion and art also suffer in an industrial regime because they both depend on a right attitude toward nature: one which that regime destroys.<sup>20</sup> The life of piety is one in which man stands in right relations with God and man, but such a life would at best be difficult to maintain in a society which destroys "manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, and romantic love. . . ."<sup>21</sup> The only remedy for this spiritual poverty, as well as the other evils of industrialism, is to throw off the industrial order and replace it with an agrarian one.<sup>22</sup>

In their contributions to *I'll Take My Stand*, the Twelve Southerners effectively combine their own views of an agrarian society with the historical example of the American South to discuss and defend the ends of agrarianism. As an alternative to the unlimited acquisitiveness and servility to appetite, and external coercion and irreligion of industrial society, the Twelve Southerners assert the goodness of an agrarian society and the moderate wealth, freedom, and piety that

it fosters. The essays of Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Lytle are especially good examples of the Twelve Southerners' efforts to present these unifying normative principles of agrarian political economy through a discussion of strengths, weaknesses, and changes in Southern economic thought and practice.

In his essay "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," John Crowe Ransom explains that the Old South had faults, but they did not include "being intemperately addicted to work and to gross material prosperity. The South never conceded that the whole duty of man was to increase material production; or that the index to the degree of his culture was the volume of his material production. His business seemed to be rather to envelop both his work and his play with a leisure which permitted the activity of intelligence."<sup>23</sup> The agrarian society of the antebellum South had countenanced the pursuit of moderate wealth not slavery to avarice. During the postwar years, however, the South allowed this tradition to degenerate. In avoiding the materialism of industrialization, she fell prey to something equally contemptible. Ransom explains, "Unregenerate Southerners were trying to live the good life on shabby equipment, and they were grotesque in their effort to make an art out of living when they were not decently making the living. . . ." Though the good life is not characterized by an addiction to work and material rewards, it cannot be grounded in an "asceticism . . . based on insufficient labor" either.<sup>24</sup> The only remedy to this physical and spiritual decline of the South is to revive farming and undergo a moderate industrialization which will allow the spirit of the South to be preserved.<sup>25</sup>

Donald Davidson's essay "A Mirror for Artists" argues that the South was and had continued to be a living example of an agrarian society worth the most heroic efforts of men to preserve. As an alternative to the model of industrial society, Davidson puts forth the example of the agrarian South. An industrial society is dirtying, dull, mechanical, standardized, and mean. It argues that "when material prosperity has finally become permanent, when we are all rich, when life has been reduced to some last

pattern of efficiency, then we shall sit down and enjoy ourselves."<sup>26</sup> The South, on the other hand, is amongst those human societies that have been "stable, religious, and agrarian; where the goodness of life is measured by a scale of values having little to do with the material values of industrialism. . . ."<sup>27</sup> This scale of values or set of ends includes "leisureliness, devotion to family and neighborhood, local self-sufficiency and self-government. . . ."<sup>28</sup> Thus even in an essay on the relationship between art and the agrarian society one finds an allusion to the ends of agrarian political economy—moderate wealth, piety, and freedom from the tyranny of the passions as well as that of other men.

In his "Remarks on Southern Religion," Allen Tate argues that the scientific, natural, and practical mind of Western civilization played havoc with the religious, contemplative, and qualitative mind of the South. The mind of Thomas Jefferson presented the South with an inheritance that left her indefensible. Jefferson's scientific mind was not subordinated to the spiritual life. It therefore determined that "the ends of man are sufficiently contained in his political destiny."<sup>29</sup> Jefferson's political economy was not subordinated to a spiritual end, and as such it contributed to the South's failure to develop a religion which fitted her agrarianism. This failure accounts not only for the South losing the war but also for her inability to defend herself successfully against the temptations of the devil which followed after the war had been lost.<sup>30</sup> Tate's essay exemplifies the Twelve Southerners' desire to construct not just a normative system of political economy but one which is properly grounded in religion. The "natural piety" of Jefferson's Enlightenment age agrarianism had failed to provide this foundation so the Twelve Southerners rejected "natural piety" in favor of the old Roman *pietas*.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, in "The Hind Tit," Andrew Nelson Lytle combined historical reference with his own values on agriculture to argue for a return to a society in which most people are engaged in farming. Lytle was perhaps the most interested of all the agrarians in the maintenance of a predominantly farming state. This essay and others that he wrote

stress farming as a means to moderate wealth, freedom, and piety. Industrial imperialism had brought upon society a conflict "which promises to deprive it, not of life, but of living; take the concept of liberty from the political consciousness and turn the pursuit of happiness into a nervous running-around which is without the logic, even, of a dog chasing its tail."<sup>32</sup> It is a moral and spiritual suicide which foretells a coming physical destruction, and socialism, communism, and sovietism do not provide an escape.<sup>33</sup>

Lytle's advocacy of the concept of moderate wealth is brought out clearly in his statement that "a farm is not a place to grow wealthy; it is a place to grow corn."<sup>34</sup> The agrarian South had never counted as riches those things which industrialism had generated. Hence the postwar plethora of goods produced by industry was not wealth but a weapon of industrial imperialism.<sup>35</sup> Before the Civil War, the small farmer remained a free man, politically and economically independent; after the War these farmers became completely subservient to the market. This put an end to their independence and began the "home-breaking" process which was bringing about the extinction of the family farm.<sup>36</sup> Lytle says of the farmer:

He has been turned into the runt pig in the sow's litter. Squeezed and tricked out of the best places at the side, he is forced to take the little hind tit for nourishment; and here, struggling between the sow's back legs, he has to work with every bit of strength to keep it from being a dry hind one, and all because the suck of the others is so unreservedly gluttonous.<sup>37</sup>

Andrew Lytle knew precisely what subject he was discussing—the political economy of agriculture. He was soon to draw on the work of an earlier agrarian political economist, John Taylor of Caroline, to show for his time and for ours that "no state is secure unless it has a sturdy agricultural body to rest upon. . . ."<sup>38</sup> The aristocracy of Paper and Patronage sought to gain at the expense of the agriculturalists in Taylor's day and the same forces were still at work in the present. This establishes for Lytle "a primary axiom

of political economy." The axiom is simple: "That nation which abuses its farmers is committing suicide. . . ."<sup>39</sup> For Lytle the preservation of a healthy society necessitates the preservation of the livelihood farm.

It was explained earlier that *I'll Take My Stand* constituted the Southern Agrarians' initial effort to construct a normative system of political economy. This work was largely a matter of ascertaining the qualities of the good life and explaining how an agrarian society would attain them. The preservation of what Andrew Lytle called the livelihood farm was their primary concern though some of the Agrarians did go on to support the more elaborate politics of the New Deal. The mainline Agrarians of *I'll Take My Stand* were generally satisfied with stating and defending principles rather than attempting to generate anything more than a very limited number of policy proposals.<sup>40</sup> As Donald Davidson would explain later, this was done for good reason.

The Southern Agrarians were advocating farming as a way of life—as a means to the ends of moderate wealth, freedom, and piety—but they first had to show that their principles were sound and that those of industrialism were decadent. The world, however, was simply not ready to agree. Davidson explained in 1939 that,

At the moment there is no getting around the fact that a large part of the human population not only is not disillusioned with industrialism itself, but actually likes or thinks it likes industrialism and wants to see it go on. The politicians, noting this fact, are by no means engaged in saving democracy, saving liberal government, or establishing a new social order. What they are saving is industrialism first of all. The social order, the democracy, the nation—all these are afterthoughts.<sup>41</sup>

In light of this Davidson argues that those who believe in agrarianism "should not permit their strong sense of imminent crisis to draw them into halfway political measures. They should not throw away wholesome principles for the sake of small expediences."<sup>42</sup>

Since the battle over principles had not been won, practical politics was simply not of much value to the agrarian cause. Policies having an impact on farm life and its preservation, on conservation, and on regionalism—"local autonomy and the diminished operation of the law of distant consequences"—were important, as were attempts at introducing some stability to the operations of industrialism. But the main concern of agrarians, according to Davidson, should be to study the agrarian way of life and to work for slow but certain change.<sup>43</sup> The Agrarian criticism of the New Deal had been that its policies were taken up as a matter of expediency before any systematic body of working principles could be defined. Ransom had pointed out the inconsistent treatment of agriculture under the New Deal in 1932, "with one hand he [Roosevelt] measures acreage out of production, and with the other hand waves city men to the farm," and Davidson finished things off in 1938 saying, "the principles were not there anyhow. . . ."<sup>44</sup>

Both the principles and the policies of the Agrarians were criticized in their own day by men such as Rupert P. Vance and W. T. Couch for suggesting that an agrarian society could provide a better life, material or otherwise, than an industrial society.<sup>45</sup> More recently, writers have spoken favorably with respect to the spirit of agrarianism, but have generally argued that the support shown for agriculture was more or less circumstantial in nature. That is to say the Agrarians were not really agrarians but scholars who were interested in defining and defending a Southern tradition and in criticizing American society in general.<sup>46</sup> Writers stress the Agrarians' concern with the nature of the good life but overlook their belief that an agricultural society provided the means to that life.<sup>47</sup> To the extent that these criticisms suggest that the Agrarians put ends before means, they are consistent with the attitudes of the Agrarians themselves. However, the implication that the Agrarians looked at agriculture as a means which could be readily replaced by some other means is not consistent with the Agrarians' position. The Agrarians were never in complete agreement on just how

important the role of agriculture was. But they did agree, and would for the most part continue to agree, that it was agriculture in particular that was of a special character and which served as a means to the good life.<sup>48</sup>

The critics of their own day also chided the Agrarians for making virtues of the "backwardness, stagnation, and poverty" of agricultural life.<sup>49</sup> One might reasonably respond to these criticisms with the argument that the Agrarians were intentionally taking an extremist position, believing that such an approach would bring better results in their war against modernity. One could argue that they were writing as poets rather than social scientists and consequently were interested in creating an image of the world as it ought to be, a myth to express a truth and affirm a value.<sup>50</sup> Still it would be a mistake to rely too heavily on this argument as a defense of the Agrarians since a number of the Twelve Southerners were quite serious about the link between agriculture and the good life. As stated earlier, Andrew Lytle suggested that a farm was a place to grow corn rather than a place to grow wealthy. Such a statement may not be the stuff of modern social science, but it is the very heart of an agrarian political economy inherited from the ancients—an inheritance which Richard M. Weaver would later draw upon in arguing for a return to the Socratic tradition in studying human society.

In the last work he published before his death, Richard Weaver, heir to the agrarianism of the Twelve Southerners, traced the intellectual origins of *I'll Take My Stand* back to Thomas Jefferson, "stripped of his French-style radicalism," and to John Taylor. He emphasized in particular the "true defense of private property" as set down in Taylor's *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policies of the Government of the United States*.<sup>51</sup> Weaver argued that agrarianism was a more comprehensive and more coherent program than either Marxism or New Dealism. It had something to say about religion, social structure, art, and the economy. On the subject of the economy the Twelve Southerners had advocated agriculture as "the best and the most sensitive vocation," one which kept man in contact

with nature, giving a natural rather than mechanical rhythm to life, and which acted as the basis of stable society. Responding to the criticisms of agrarianism as simply a "back to the soil" movement based on pure romanticism, Weaver says that "the belief that there is a relationship between the life of rural husbandry and political and civic virtue goes back to ancient times."<sup>52</sup> He quotes Aristotle, Xenophon, and Horace, and he reminds us that "one of the most frequently cited causes of the death of the [Roman] Republic" had been her failure "to get people out of the cities and back to the land."<sup>53</sup>

Weaver's defense of agrarianism as a relatively coherent and comprehensive program was based on its preparedness to speak to a variety of questions ranging from religion to the economy, from the spiritual to the material. The "geographical and historical particularity" of Southern Agrarianism was in no way incompatible with its embodiment of objective truths applicable at all times and in all places. These objective truths had to do with human happiness and its relationship to "the creation, the nature of man, and the ends of living," the metaphysical foundations of Southern agrarian life.<sup>54</sup> Weaver finds in the history of agrarian political economy a coherency which is based on a set of values, or better, a set of metaphysical truths which is the origin of those values. Thus, not surprisingly, Weaver argues in his essays on rhetoric against the attempt to maintain a value-free social science. This effort has only resulted in the concealment of value statements in what appear to be "positive" terms but which are in fact "dialectical" terms.<sup>55</sup> The social scientist as he exists today faces a dilemma when he tries to act on Max Weber's admonition to remain value-free and yet include some discussion of values in his teaching. The problem is that he lacks the methodological tools needed to do so.<sup>56</sup> This would not be the case if social scientists would make use of positive science but at the same time realize first that much of what they study is subjective in nature, and second that they are writing as men. The social scientist "cannot free himself entirely from perspective. . . . To argue that the social

scientist should adopt no perspective on matters is perhaps in itself to adopt a perspective, but a far less fruitful one than those in which, with proper regard for objective facts, a viewpoint is frankly espoused."<sup>57</sup>

One should not mistake Weaver's position for one which suggests that no objective knowledge of truth and goodness is possible. That is clearly not the case. In his essay "To Write the Truth," Weaver laments the day when Baconian empiricism led men to believe that "the Essential Forms or true differences of things cannot by any human diligence be found out." This had been the basis for abandoning rhetoric as "teaching people to speak the truth" and replacing it with teaching people to speak with "conventional correctness," that is, rhetoric as teaching "a sort of etiquette."<sup>58</sup> It was Weaver's position, however, that a change should be made in the study of human society. That study, he declared, should be called "social philosophy" rather than social science.

This would widen its universe of discourse, freeing it from the positivistic limitations of science and associating its followers with the love of wisdom. At the same time it would enable them to practise the art of noble rhetoric where it is called for, without unconscious deception and without feeling that they are compromising their profession.<sup>59</sup>

It has been argued elsewhere that "what was essential to the Agrarian enterprise . . . found its final completion in Weaver's more general and sustained excursions into social theory, rhetoric, educational philosophy, intellectual history, and related fields."<sup>60</sup> In searching out the metaphysical foundations of Southern agrarian life, Richard M. Weaver came to the conclusion that agrarianism was a coherent body of ideas because it was concerned with both means and ends. His methodological prescription for the social sciences was that they should abandon logical positivism and take up the art of noble rhetoric. They should, in other words, be concerned with the search for truth about both means and ends. This prescription is a distillation of the implicit methodology of *I'll Take My Stand* made explicit in Tate's

"Notes on Liberty and Property" and Davidson's "An Agrarian Looks at the New Deal." It is the assertion that the search for truth about ends or first principles is at least as much a part of the proper study of political economy as the formulation of policies to achieve those ends. The rejection of this view has only served to generate two inescapably nihilistic forms of political economy in the twentieth century—welfare economics and the "New Political Economy" of James M. Buchanan.<sup>61</sup>

Earlier in this century economists sought to improve upon the Pareto optimal welfare statement that individual wants—the absolute or "ultimate reality" of modern economics—are satisfied to the fullest extent possible by free trade, given an initial distribution of wealth. The problem was that in order to go beyond the Pareto optimal condition one had to take goods from one person and give them to another, and then be able to say that the economic welfare of society had increased. That, however, required a normative judgment, "an interpersonal comparison of utility," and violated the "scientific" nature of economics. Efforts were made to remedy this "condition of ethical nihilism" in welfare economics through the derivation of compensation principles which would allow economists to derive an unambiguous definition of "an increase of social income, in the sense of an increase in *potential* welfare . . . without comparing individual gains and losses. . . ." Within a few years, however, it became clear that no such principles could be devised. Hence the discussion came full circle in 1950 with I. M. D. Little concluding that value statements simply could not be avoided in welfare economics.<sup>62</sup>

Along another avenue of approach, work was done on the problem of constructing "a Paretian-type social welfare function," a conceptual representation of the levels of social welfare reached by more fully satisfying the wants of all citizens, and by satisfying the wants of one citizen more fully than another. As Maurice Dobb has commented, this function was introduced as a *deus ex machina* to select but one of the infinite number of input-output levels and income distributions that are Pareto optimal, i.e.,

that correspond to the satisfaction of some of citizen A's wants and some of citizen B's wants, and that make it impossible to improve the economic position of one of them without worsening that of the other. While economists welcomed this reintroduction of value statements to the *wertfrei* welfare economics, it was not long before Kenneth Arrow came forward with his Impossibility Theorem, raising doubts as to the possibility of constructing a social welfare function at all. Arrow declared that if we disallow the use of dictatorial imposition and/or interpersonal comparisons of utility (both violations of the absolutized individual preference), then no set of rules exists which will make it possible to construct a social welfare function based on even so elementary a value as that individual preferences should count.<sup>63</sup>

In a more recent attempt to construct a system of political economy, James M. Buchanan has recommended that there be a change in the basic approach of economics. Buchanan rejects the Robbinsian vision of economics as the study of choice-making under conditions of scarcity.<sup>64</sup> In its place he proposes that economists take up symbiotics, "the study of the association between dissimilar organisms . . . [where] the association is mutually beneficial to all parties."<sup>65</sup> This approach is consistent with what is described elsewhere as Buchanan's view that "the function of social science is to construct insti-

tutions in which men can satisfy their desires without harming others or, more precisely, what harm they do to others is at least internalized in the decision-making process."<sup>66</sup> Given such a view of the role of social science, it is not surprising to find that individual wants are the absolute or "ultimate reality" in Buchanan's political economy just as they are in welfare economics. Despite his differences with welfare economists, Buchanan's conception of the public good, aptly described as "the satisfaction of desire or appetite even though we do not know what men desire, nor do we know what constitutes happiness," leads to the same nihilistic conclusions that the welfare economists reached years ago.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear that the ethical nihilism of both welfare economics and Buchanan's "New Political Economy" is a direct consequence of their adherence to the methodological strictures of logical positivism. The absoluteness of individual preferences is a given and is non-discussible since such a discussion would be "unscientific." The nihilism of these modern forms of political economy can, however, be avoided, but only if Richard Weaver's call to replace social science with social philosophy is taken seriously. It would mean restoring the use of right reason to political economy. That, after all, is what the Twelve Southerners did, and their work can act as a guide to anyone who seeks to do the same.

<sup>1</sup>Donald Davidson, "'I'll Take My Stand': A History," *American Review*, vol. 5 (Summer, 1935), 309-310. <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 310. <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 313. <sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 311. <sup>5</sup>Allen Tate, "Notes on Liberty and Property," in *Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence*, ed. Herbert Agar and Allen Tate (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936), p. 91. <sup>6</sup>Davidson, "An Agrarian Looks at the New Deal," *Free America*, 2 (June, 1938), 3-5, 17. <sup>7</sup>Davidson, "'I'll Take My Stand,'" pp. 317-318. <sup>8</sup>Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Introduction," in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, by Twelve Southerners (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), p. xviii. <sup>9</sup>Thomas L. Connelly, "The Vanderbilt Agrarians: Time and Place in Southern Tradition," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 22 (March, 1963), 32-34; Theodore O. Hoepfner, "Economics of Agrarianism," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 13 (Spring, 1960), 61-68. For some of the general policy prescriptions see Frank Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," *American Review*, 4 (March, 1935), 529-535; John

Crowe Ransom, "Happy Farmers," *American Review*, 1 (October, 1933), 513-535; Donald Davidson, *The Attack on Leviathan: Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938). <sup>10</sup>Joseph A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, ed. Elizabeth Boody Schumpeter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 38. <sup>11</sup>In 1890 John Neville Keynes was arguing that "a body of systematized knowledge relating to criteria of what ought to be . . ." does qualify as a science. "Logic and ethics are both of them sciences, although they are concerned with *right* reason and *right* conduct respectively." By 1932 Lionel Robbins, a logical positivist, was arguing that a statement of what ought to be "is not a matter of scientific verification. . . ." It is not a part of economics because "economics is not concerned at all with any ends *as such*." See John Neville Keynes, *The Scope and Method of Political Economy*, 4th ed. (1917; reprint ed. Clifton: Augustus M. Kelly, 1973), p. 35; Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Signifi-*



cance of *Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1946), pp. 29–30, 149–150. In a book published in 1976, Robbins continued with this argument suggesting that because political economy, the formulation of economic policies, makes use of normative assumptions, it is not scientific economics. See Lord Lionel Robbins, *Political Economy: Past and Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 2–3.

<sup>12</sup>Tipton R. Snaveley, “Economic Thought and Economic Policy in the South,” *Southern Economic Journal*, 1 (October, 1933), 3–14. Snaveley criticizes Robbins’ view of economics and mentions *I’ll Take My Stand* twice in his discussion as an example of the normative side of Southern economic thought.

<sup>13</sup>Barry Gordon, *Economic Analysis Before Adam Smith: Hesiod to Lessius* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975), pp. 33–39.

<sup>14</sup>Weaver’s methodological prescription for the social sciences is found in his article “Concealed Rhetoric in Scientistic Sociology.” The relationship between this prescription and the Twelve Southerners’ work will be considered in more detail at the end of this paper.

<sup>15</sup>Twelve Southerners, “Introduction: A Statement of Principles,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, pp. xxviii–xxix.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxi. <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. xxiv, xxvii–xxviii. In the *Politics*, Aristotle explains that “the amount of property which is needed for the good life is not unlimited.” See Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941) 1256b32. The common ground that the Agrarians share with the ancients, especially Aristotle on this particular matter, has been very recently pointed out by William C. Havard. See “The Politics of *I’ll Take My Stand*,” *Southern Review*, 16 (October, 1980), 772–773. For a comparison of the agrarian views of Aristotle and the antebellum predecessors of the Twelve Southerners, see J. S. Marshall, “Aristotle and the Agrarians,” *Review of Politics*, 9 (July, 1947), 350–361.

<sup>19</sup>Twelve Southerners, “Introduction: A Statement,” pp. xxiii–xxiv.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxv. <sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxv. <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxv–xxvi. <sup>23</sup>John Crowe Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. 12. <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16. <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 18–22. <sup>26</sup>Davidson, “A Mirror for Artists,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, pp. 28–30. <sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29. <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 53–54. <sup>29</sup>Tate, “Remarks on the Southern Religion,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. 173. <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 173–174. <sup>31</sup>Patrick F. Quinn has argued that the principles of the Agrarians were the principles of Jefferson. The importance of widespread property ownership and family-scale industry, the view of agriculture as a way of life, and the reverence for tradition rather than the philosophy of progress were all a part of the principles of both Jefferson and the Southern Agrarians. It must be pointed out, however, that the Southern Agrarians also shared in the perspective of later antebellum thinkers who believed they had good reason to disavow some of Jefferson’s enlightenment thinking. In particular they did this in regard to the matter of piety. For Quinn’s analysis, see “Agrarianism and the Jeffersonian Philosophy,” *Review of Politics*, 2 (January, 1940), 87–104. For a description of Jefferson’s enlightenment view of religion as a matter of morality rather than theology and his consequent view of “humane morality . . . as a kind

of natural piety,” see Daniel Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), pp. 29, 54–56, 140–151, 155, 243–248; Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1957), p. 39. The concept of piety adhered to by most of the Twelve Southerners is stated in Andrew Lytle’s contribution to the Agrarian-Distributist symposium, *Who Owns America?* Lytle explains that small farmers enjoy a way of life filled with the old Roman *pietas*—belief in God, respect for the family, a sense of duty to his country. See Andrew Nelson Lytle, “The Small Farm Secures the State,” in *Who Owns America?*, pp. 238–247. <sup>32</sup>Andrew Nelson Lytle, “The Hind Tit,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, pp. 202–203. <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 203. <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 205. <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 202, 207–208. Lytle would later explain that “the economy of modern times . . . has assumed that the greatest good lies in the alternate stuffing and purging of a man’s belly.” See Lytle, “The Small Farm,” p. 240. <sup>36</sup>Lytle, “The Hind Tit,” pp. 214–215, 236–237. <sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 245. <sup>38</sup>Lytle, “John Taylor and the Political Economy of Agriculture,” *American Review*, 3 and 4 (September, October, and November, 1934), 437. <sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 437, 639–643, 84–86. <sup>40</sup>Davidson, “Agrarianism and Politics,” *Review of Politics*, 1 (March, 1939), 114–117. <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 123–124. <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 124. <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 124–125. <sup>44</sup>Ransom, “Happy Farmers,” p. 526; Davidson, “An Agrarian Looks,” p. 3; Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 40. <sup>45</sup>W. T. Couch, “The Agrarian Romance,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 36 (October, 1937), 419–430; Karanikas, *Tillers*, pp. 50–51. <sup>46</sup>Connelly, “The Vanderbilt Agrarians,” pp. 22–23, 32–37. <sup>47</sup>Rubin, “Introduction,” pp. xiv–xv. <sup>48</sup>This is the gist of the responses of a number of the Agrarians to questions put to them in a 1952 symposium; see, “A Symposium: The Agrarians Today,” *Shenandoah*, 3 (Summer, 1952), 14–37. In a letter to Herbert Agar, dated December 9, 1936, Allen Tate expressed his desire that the distinctively agrarian view not become lost in a larger collection of decentralist thinking. Tate explained, “I cannot see our position as a single contribution to a more inclusive position. . . . We are the center to which other various movements must be drawn. If democracy means anything to us, it means the position that we have defined and developed; it doesn’t mean that position plus the other movements which seem to me to be useful approximations of what we want.” Quoted in Edward S. Shapiro, “American Conservative Intellectuals, the 1930’s and the Crisis of Ideology,” *Modern Age*, 23 (Fall, 1979), 376–377. <sup>49</sup>Karanikas, *Tillers*, pp. 50–51. <sup>50</sup>Virginia Rock, “The Fugitive-Agrarians in Response to Social Change,” *Southern Humanities Review*, 1 (Summer, 1967), 172–177. <sup>51</sup>Richard M. Weaver, “The Southern Phoenix,” *Georgia Review*, 17 (Spring, 1963), 6–8. <sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 13–15. <sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15–16. <sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17. In response to those who attacked the Agrarians by saying, “you can’t turn back the clock,” Weaver suggested that what the Agrarians and a lot of other people were saying was that “there are some things which do not have their subsistence in time, and that certain virtues should be cultivated regardless of the era in which one finds oneself

born. It is the most arrant presentism to say that a philosophy is found in the past and the past is now gone. The whole value of philosophy lies in its detachment from accidental conditions of this kind and its adherence to the essential." See Richard M. Weaver, "The Tennessee Agrarians," *Shenandoah*, 3 (Summer, 1952), 8; "The South and the American Union," in *The Lasting South: Fourteen Southerners Look at Their Home*, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and James Jackson Kilpatrick (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1957), pp. 51-52. <sup>55</sup>Weaver, "Concealed Rhetoric in Scientific Sociology," in *Language is Sermonic*, ed. Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), pp. 139-140, 143-148. <sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 156-157. Weber had made a forceful argument for the use of the fact-value distinction in the social sciences. See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 39-40. <sup>57</sup>Weaver, "Concealed Rhetoric," pp. 157-158. <sup>58</sup>Weaver, "To Write the Truth," in *Language is Sermonic*, pp. 188-191, 198. Elsewhere Weaver suggests that men are born with "a sense of ought." See "Language is Sermonic," in *Language is Sermonic*, p. 221. Also see James Powell, "The Foundations of Weaver's Traditionalism," *New Individualist Review*, 3 (October 3, 1964), 3-4. <sup>59</sup>Weaver, "Concealed Rhetoric," p. 158. <sup>60</sup>M. E. Bradford, "The Agrarianism of Richard Weaver: Beginnings and Completions," *Modern Age*, 14 (Summer-Fall, 1970), 250. <sup>61</sup>William F. Campbell, "Political Economy: New, Old, and Ancient," *The Intercollegiate Review*, 12 (Winter, 1976-77), 67, 69. <sup>62</sup>Maurice Dobb, *Welfare Economics and the Economics of Socialism: Towards a Common-sense Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 1969), pp. 3, 77-85; E. J. Mishan, "A Survey of Welfare Economics, 1939-1959," in *Welfare Economics: Five Introductory Lectures*, by E. J. Mishan (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 37-51. <sup>63</sup>Regarding this matter, E. J. Mishan has said, "While the formal layout of Arrow's argument was impressive, it would not be unfair to suggest that the conclusion was hardly surprising. One does not have to venture beyond a vision of two stubborn men on an island with mutually opposite ideas about proper division of labor, and the fruits thereof, to run into an impasse of this sort." But Lionel Robbins had already given the logical positivist answer to this problem in the 1930's: The men can fight or they can tolerate each other, but there is no scientific analysis which can generate an agreement between them on matters of ends. See Mishan, "A Survey," pp. 63-66; James Quirk and Rubin Saposnik, *Introduction to General Equilibrium Theory and Welfare Economics* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968), pp. 104-109; Lionel Robbins, *Essay*, pp. 150-151; Dobb, *Welfare Economics*, pp. 110-116. <sup>64</sup>James M. Buchanan, *What Should Economists Do?* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), pp. 19-21. Campbell states that this "New Political Economy" is a combination of logical positivism and methodological individualism. See Campbell, "Political Economy," p. 67. <sup>65</sup>Buchanan, *What Should Economists Do?*, p. 27. <sup>66</sup>Campbell, "Political Economy," p. 70. <sup>67</sup>Hence Buchanan's suggestion that "as a value statement" George Stigler's advice—that one should avoid concern with methodology until reaching the age of sixty-five—"can hardly be discussed." (Emphasis added.) See Buchanan, *What Should Economists Do?*, p. 17; Campbell, "Political Economy," p. 70.